WHEN·THE·BUGLE CALLED

EDITH TATUM

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By

EDITH TATUM

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To my father,
EDWARD CRENSHAW,
and to
MAY HARRIS,
to whose encouragement this little volume owes so much, it is affectionately dedicated.

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WHEN THE BUGLE CALLED

CHAPTER I

A Crucifix and a Red Ribbon

"I LEAVE everything in your hands, my dear, with perfect confidence that all will be well." Captain Dupré paced the library floor, his sword clanking at every step—while Marie, his eldest daughter, stood by the table, receiving his final instructions.

"Consult with old Jerry about plantation affairs—he is to be trusted implicitly. A girl of nineteen is rather young to be left in charge of a family and a big plantation, eh?" And he looked at her with a questioning smile. White to the lips, but with brave eyes, she smiled back at him.

"You have always helped me so much about the place that I know you are thoroughly competent to manage it; and Dahlia is old enough to help you with household affairs and the children."

She shook her head doubtfully.

"Dahlia is such a child, in spite of her sixteen years—such a wild thing; she needs looking after herself," she said. "But Mammy Cindy will take much off my mind. You needn't worry one bit about anything, father; we will get on beautifully. If only——" Her voice broke and she stood silent.

He paused, waiting for her to complete her sentence.

"Well? If only——?"

"It is the danger to you, father. Oh, this horrible war!" And she covered her face with her hands, sobbing quietly.

"Hush, my dear; you must be brave, for the children's sake; they look to you, you know. I would not leave you if I could help it. Would you have an army go to defend the firesides of the South without a Dupré in it? When the bugle calls, must I stop my ears?"

"No, no!" she cried, throwing up her head, her gray eyes flashing. "I would not

have you stay! Oh, I wish I were a man and could go in your stead! Thank God dear mother is not here to have the sorrow of it all!" she added in a low voice.

A shadow crossed the Captain's face, and he turned away to the window.

"There comes Tom with the horses," he said at last; "I must be going."

With a little inarticulate cry she ran to him and clasped her arms around his neck.

"Oh, father, come back to us soon!" she whispered.

They stood silently in a long embrace, then she stepped back and regarded him with eyes shining through tears.

"How fine and brave you look!" she said, smiling at him tenderly. "How I would love to ride by your side and fight, too!"

"You can fight for our dear Southland here at home with your prayers, little daughter, and you can help me by keeping a brave heart. There is one thing more," he added, his hand on the door; "if you should need

advice about anything, go to Father De Berne—he has promised to have all of you under his special care."

With perfect composure she followed him into the hall, where were gathered the children and some of the house servants to say good-by.

"Oh, father, if you would only let me go!" cried Philip, a manly-looking boy of fourteen, as he returned his father's warm embrace.

"And leave your sisters without a protector? No, my boy, your place is here; I hope the motherland will not need such youths as you to fight for her. Dahlia, Dahlia, little girl, you must not cry so! Remember, you are almost a woman. You will bear your part bravely, will you not?" But Dahlia was past speaking, and she rushed from her father's arms up the stairs, to cry it out in her own room.

Five-year-old Elsie was wailing, too, though scarcely realizing why; but baby Richard, with cocked hat of paper and wooden

sword, paraded the hall, wild with excitement.

"I want to go wif ou, farver, and kill a Yankee; I could just chop off his head!"

His father kissed him with wet eyes.

"Take care that you are a good laddie, and don't let sister Marie cry while I am away. God keep you all, my darlings. Mammy Cindy, look after them for me."

"Dat I will, Mars Phil. Cindy sho' will tek good keer er her babies. An' I hope de good Lawd will fetch you home ergin soon, Mars Phil," sobbed the old negress.

So Captain Philip Dupré rode away to Fairview, the county seat, to join his company in the spring of 1861, and Marie stood on the stone steps and watched him until the big gates clanged behind him. With a deep sigh she turned back to the children standing sorrowfully on the portico.

"No lessons to-day, dears," she said. "How would you like a walk to the river? We could take a basket and gather some wild flowers."

The three faces brightened instantly, and Elsie and little Dick ran to get hats and a basket, calling loudly as they ran for Snowdrop and Mose.

Just then the sound of the gates slamming and the pounding of iron-shod hoofs on the gravel made Marie look around. Three gray-clad figures on beautiful, spirited horses were coming full tilt up the driveway.

"It is Sydney Elmore, and Keith, and Michael!" cried Philip excitedly. "They must be going this morning, too. Oh, I say!" he continued, as they dismounted and, throwing the reins to convenient little darkies, came up the steps, "it's a shame I can't go, too."

"You!" said Michael, pinching his ear. "There isn't a nursery department in the army, you know."

"But Syd's going, and he's only eighteen," the boy protested.

"There is a vast difference in fourteen and eighteen, my son," laughed Sydney Elmore, patting Philip's head patronizingly.

Sydney Elmore was a fair, slender youth, the son of a wealthy planter, who owned a beautiful place, "Huntingdon," further up the river. The families had been lifelong friends, and he had grown up with the Dupré children, Dahlia being the special object of his boyish devotion.

The other two young soldiers lived at "Idlewild," the plantation adjoining "Oakdale." They were splendid specimens of Southern manhood—handsome, tall, and strong, with faces good to look upon. Though only cousins, they might have passed for brothers, so strikingly alike they were, there being only a slight difference in coloring and expression.

"Idlewild" had been left to Keith Cavanagh—the elder of the two—and his sister Aileen by the old uncle who had reared the three orphan children. Michael, to whom his uncle had bequeathed money, had adopted the profession of law, but still made "Idlewild" his home.

"We have come to say good-by, Marie,"

said Keith. "We decided that it would be better just to go right on to Fairview this morning. Captain Dupré has gone already, has he not?"

"Yes," answered Marie, "he had some business there to attend to."

She spoke with difficulty, and leaned against one of the fluted columns of the portico for support. There was something pathetic and appealing in the dejected attitude and drooping head—she seemed so slight and young.

The brown eyes of Keith and the blue eyes of Michael were full of love and yearning tenderness as they looked at her. Her own were so filled with tears that she would not raise them.

Both men turned, and their glances met challengingly. But Marie was getting herself in hand, and at last she smiled at them through her tears.

"I will not say good-by," she faltered; "it sounds too sad. I'll say *God bless you,* instead."

"Mars Keith," said a voice from the corner of the portico, "h'yers de lef' hine foots er two graveyard rabbits I kotch fer you an' Mars Michael. Dey'll keep dem Yankees f'um hittin' you, an' mek you an' Mars Mike shoot ez straight ez er beeline," and an old negro man, hat in hand, came up the steps to present his gifts.

"Why, thank you, Uncle Jerry. That was certainly thoughtful of you."

"An', Mars Keith, don't you let dem Yankees come down h'yer an' pester we-all."

Both young men laughed.

"Why, we'll have them all running back home in a month, Uncle Jerry!" cried Michael.

"Das all right, Mars Michael. Jes' be sho' you does, so ez you kin come back home. Lil' Miss don't look so mighty peart. Ole Marster he done gone dis mawnin', an' now h'yer goes you an' Mars Keith. An' whut Miss Dahlia gwine do ef you goes, Mars Syd?" he continued, turning to where young Elmore stood leaning against the door.

"Oh, we'll be back in a few weeks, Uncle Jerry," laughed Sydney. "They will be glad to be rid of us for a while."

"I dunno' so much erbout dat. An' I's pow'ful feared you-all is bit off more'n you kin chaw. I spec lil' Miss an' Miss Dahlia gwine git mighty lonesome 'fore you-all gits back."

He walked away, shaking his head sadly.

"Aileen says tell you she will be over this afternoon," said Keith, turning to Marie. "I feel so much happier about leaving her, knowing that she will be over here with you. I could not leave her there at 'Idlewild' alone."

"And I—I have nothing to leave," said Michael, with unusual bitterness; "no one to weep for me if I should fall."

"Oh, Michael!" cried Marie in a hurt voice, and she held out her hands to him impulsively.

Michael raised first one and then the other to his lips.

"Where is Dahlia?" asked Keith, in a

cool, changed tone. "We must be going, and I would like to say good-by to her."

"Yes," added Sydney eagerly; "we can't go without seeing Dahlia."

So Dahlia was summoned, and came down with her face red and swollen from crying.

"How grand you look!" she cried, with forced gayety. "Oh, those beautiful uniforms! Don't I wish I were a man and could go fight, too! And good luck to you! What is it I must say—to come back with your shields, or on them?" She laughed a little hysterically. "Anyway, don't dare to come home until you have whipped every Yankee on the continent, individually and collectively. Good-by, Keith—oh, excuse me! I mean *Lieutenant Cavanagh*. Good-by, Michael."

They turned from her to Marie, who stood by, white and silent.

"Take care of Aileen for me," Keith said to her; "don't let her grieve for us too much. Good-by." He held her hand lingeringly, and hesitated as though there was something

more he wanted to say; but finally, looking very grave, he went down the steps without another word.

Michael, his blue eyes misty with unshed tears, whispered: "God bless you. Pray for us, dear."

Young Elmore had drawn Dahlia to one side, and, with his boyish face full of emotion, whispered his farewells.

"Dahlia," he said, clasping her small brown hand in his, "I am going away to fight for the South, and *you*. I may never come back. Give me something of yours—some little token to carry away with me."

"What shall it be?" asked the girl, with a nervous laugh, broken by a sob. "A rose?"

"A rose fades so soon, Dahlia," he objected. "Give me something better." He drew her closer to him. "Couldn't you give me a kiss, sweetheart, just this once?"

Dahlia drew back hastily. "No, no, Sydney, not that!" she cried. "Here, you shall have this." And with eager fingers she unfastened the broad red ribbon that held her

thick, dark curls in place, and tied it around the boy's arm.

"There, Sir Knight," she said, "you shall wear my colors."

"And I will protect them with my life," he said fervently. "I will be your knight for ever and ever, fair lady. Think of me often, Dahlia, won't you?"

"Come on, Sydney; we are waiting for you," broke in Keith's voice. He and Michael had mounted their horses and were having difficulty in curbing the restless, fretting animals.

"Good-by! good-by!" cried Sydney, and tearing himself away from Dahlia, he ran hastily down the steps.

Then the three young patriots rode away together into the sweet spring sunshine to defend the land they loved so well.

That night Dahlia, dreaming of love and war, and a gray-clad soldier crowned with glory, who laid his trophies at her feet, murmured his name continually in her restless sleep.

To Marie it was the bitterest night of her whole life. She knelt long by her open window in an agony of prayer for those dear to her, and asking for strength to walk unfalteringly in whatever path the good God might choose for her.

"Oh, if I can only be brave, and do my duty as I should!" she cried, putting her hand to her aching throat. Then she started to her feet with a little alarmed cry. Her crucifix was gone! It was one she had worn on a little chain around her neck since infancy, and she prized it more than anything she possessed. It had belonged to her grandmother, and had been blessed by a Pope. Marie had once told Keith and Michael Cavanagh that the man she should love must wear it to preserve him from all evil, and Keith, being a Presbyterian, had laughed. She lit her candle with shaking hands and went to the nursery and aroused Mammy Cindy.

"Mammy, I have lost my crucifix," she said; "come help me find it."

The search proved fruitless, as the crucifix could not be found, whereupon the old negress shook her head, sighing dismally: "Honey chile, yo' mammy sho' do hate dat. Some'n gwine er happen ter bring yer mis'ry. Dat crucifix wuz lost twict befo' you wuz bawn'd, an' it allers brung trouble."

CHAPTER II

Three Years Later

Stretched on the dry grass behind the office were five small people in earnest conversation. The office—that convenient lounging and smoking den for the men of all old Southern plantation families—was on the left of the house at "Oakdale." Behind it the grass grew thick, while shrubs and evergreen trees screened it from the outside world. Here for generations Dupré children, with their little black satellites, had gathered for secret conferences.

"I heard Marie tell Miss Aileen this morning that since our side had lost that last battle there was nothing to keep the Yankees from coming right on down through here," Elsie, the oldest of the group, was saying.

"De Lawd he'p! Den what is we-all

gwine ter do!" cried Snowdrop, in a voice of great alarm. Snowdrop was Elsie's own individual property, and was as black as anything human could be. "What is we gwine do, Miss Elsie?" she reiterated.

"I don't know, Snow; nothing, I reckon. Father De Berne told Marie not to worry, that *of course* they wouldn't do anything to harm women and children—that they aren't making war on *us*."

"Did you ever see a Yankee, Elsie?" asked Dick, in an awed tone.

"Mammy Cindy say she seed one onct," essayed Mose, Snowdrop's younger brother and the constant companion of Dick. "She say dey don't look lak we-all's white folks, an' dey don't talk lak 'em, nuther."

"Rance he say dey hev horns an' hufs an' gret long tails, wid fire shootin' outen dey eyes," put in the youngest of the group, in a whisper of delicious horror.

"Aw, go 'long, Jink! Rance wuz er talkin' erbout de debbil!" said Snowdrop, with an air of great superiority.

"Well, ain't Yankees all devils?" inquired Dick.

"For shame, Dick! Of course not!" exclaimed Elsie. "They are people just like we are. Father De Berne said so at Sunday-school last Sunday."

"Well, dey ain't lak we-all's folks," objected Snowdrop, "'cause dey's all po' white trash."

"Marie says she's afraid the Yankees will keep Santa Claus from coming," said Dick sorrowfully.

"Oh, well, it's three weeks until Christmas. Maybe our folks can get another army and whip 'em before then," answered Elsie cheerfully. "I hope so, anyway, 'cause I do want a new dress *so* badly. It has been such a long time since I had one."

"And I want a wagon and a gun," answered Dick.

"Is Mars Phil comin' home dis Crismus?" inquired Snowdrop.

"No, nobody's coming. I heard Miss Aileen and Marie talking about it to-day.

They haven't heard from Mr. Keith in a long time—they're 'fraid he is killed."

"Mammy Cindy say he sho' is kilt, 'caze Miss Marie ain't nuver foun' her crucifix, an' de udder night Mammy she see er ha'nt in de 'Idlewild' grove, an' she say hit's er sign he sho' is dade."

"Nonsense, Snowdrop; there aren't any such things as ha'nts!" But Elsie looked behind her apprehensively nevertheless.

"No sich things ez ha'nts! You jes' ax ole Unc' Eph'um—he kin tell you better'n dat."

While these important matters were under discussion behind the office, Marie and Aileen were seated at a little table in Marie's room sewing. Both girls wore plain homespun cotton dresses, and the faces of both were pale and sad.

"When was your last letter from Michael dated, Marie?" asked Aileen, lifting her eyes from her work to her friend's downcast face.

"Five weeks ago yesterday."

"And he said no word of Keith?"

"Not one."

"He must have had no trace of him." Aileen's eyes filled with tears. "I wonder where Michael is now?" she continued sadly.

Just then there was a knock at the door, and Mammy Cindy entered the room, a note in her hand.

"Honey chile, h'yers er note Rance gimme at de do'—he say young Marster sent it to you."

With a feeling of apprehension, Marie took the note and opened it hastily. She read it with Aileen looking over her shoulder.

"This is to say good-by" (the note ran). "Rance and I are off to join the army. The South needs me. I am doing no one any good at home, and I cannot rest any longer without striking one blow to repel this wicked invasion. Don't be angry with me, dear Marie, for you know I can't help it—it is in the blood. Good-by to all—and please forgive me. "Your brother,

"PHILIP DUPRÉ, JR."

For an instant Marie's head drooped like a wilting flower.

"And he just seventeen!" she whispered. Then she sprang to her feet, her gray eyes flashing. "Oh, the South *must* win, with such souls as that in its boys! God bless him, and nerve his arm to fight for his native land!"

Again there was a knock at the door, and Mammy, opening it, admitted old Jerry, the overseer.

"Good-morning, Uncle Jerry!" exclaimed the girls pleasantly.

"Mornin', lil' Miss; mornin', Miss Aileen."

Then the old man stood silently looking from one sweet face to the other.

"What's the matter, Uncle Jerry?" laughed Aileen. "What makes you look at us like that?"

"Hit's dem homespun dresses," he burst out sorrowfully; "hit's dem homespun dresses. Jerry nuver did 'spec ter see de quality dressed lak dat, an' it hurts his feel-

in's. Lil' Miss," he continued, turning to Marie, "I h'yer whisperin's eroun' an' erbout dat dem Yankees ain't so pow'ful fur off, an' dey mout come dis way, an' I jes' wants ter insult wid yer 'bout whut we gwine ter do."

"There isn't anything we can do, Uncle Jerry, except trust in the Lord."

"Da's all ve'y well, honey, but de Lawd spec's ev'ybody ter do some'n ter he'p deyselves fus'. Dar's de silver, an' de jew'lry, an' de hosses, an' de mules——"

"Uncle Jerry!" cried Marie, with horrified face; "the silver and the jewelry! What on earth are you talking about? You don't suppose for an instant that they want such things, or would take them if they did? Can't soldiers be *gentlemen?*"

"Yassum, honey, dey kin; but you see hit's dis-er-way: Soldiers is mos' in giner'lly soldiers, an' Yankees ain't lak we-all. You sho' better listen ter ole Jerry, an' hide ev'ything you wants befo' dey gits h'yer, when you h'yers dey is comin'. An' be mighty keerful,

lil' Miss, 'caze dar is some niggers on dis place dat you sho' cyarn' trus'."

"An' dat's de Lawd's trufe!" cried Mammy. "Dar's dat old slue-foot nigger, Ben—he is plum crazy 'bout dem Yankees. Say dey gwine mek all de black folks free! But dar's one thing sartin an' sho', hit'll tek more dan er Yankee army ter free Mammy f'um her chullen!"

"Lil' Miss," Jerry continued, "I jes' want er say ef you needs me kinder secret lak, you jes' send me word ter come an' men' de side po'ch steps, an' I'll onderstan'. Den you kin set on de steps an' see behine my back, an' I kin see onder de house an' behine you, so we kin insult tergedder an' none er dem sneakin' niggers kin h'yer whut we say."

"That's a good plan, Uncle Jerry, but I hope we won't have to resort to it."

"Wall, da's all fur de present. Mawnin', lil' Miss; mawnin', Miss Aileen." And Jerry bowed himself out.

In silence the girls went back to their sewing. They had ripped up an old silk dress of

Aileen's—all Marie's had been used up long ago—and were remaking it into a dress for Elsie's Christmas gift. Uncle Jerry, who had great skill with his knife, was cutting Dick a gun of soft white pine, and would make him a wagon, and that would be the extent of his "Santa Claus." But Marie consoled herself by planning a delicious Christmas dinner. There should be good things in abundance, and all the negroes in the quarters should feast, too.

"What a sad Christmas it will be," sighed Aileen.

"Yes, but we mustn't be sad. At that season all children should be happy, so we must be cheerful for their sakes. They are looking forward to it so! Do you remember the lovely things father brought them the year before last? How full of hope the South was then!"

"There is no chance of Colonel Dupré getting here this year, is there?"

"Oh, no; not the least! He is with Lee in Virginia."

Here Mammy Cindy put her head in the door.

"Honey," she said, "you say you want er see Unc' Eph'um f'um 'Huntin'don' nex' time he come over. Well, h'yer he is at de po'ch; say he want er pass de time er day wid you an' Miss Aileen."

"Tell him we are coming right now," exclaimed Marie eagerly. "I want to know if they have had a letter from Sydney recently; he might have mentioned Keith and Michael."

She and Aileen put down their sewing hastily and went out on the porch.

"Good-morning, Uncle Eph," said both girls cordially.

"Howdy, Mistiss; howdy, Miss Aileen," responded the old negro, bowing low, hat in hand.

"How are things serving you these days?" Aileen inquired, with one of her brightest smiles.

"Things sarve old Eph'um sorter good an' sorter bad, Miss Aileen; but da's de bes' we

kin 'spec' in dis worl', honey. Jordan am er hard road ter trabel sometimes."

"Uncle Eph, has Mr. Elmore had another letter from Sydney lately?" asked Marie anxiously.

"Naw, honey, he ain't. Hit's been er long time sence ole Marster h'yered a word; an' dar he sets, er honin' an' er griebin' till hit jes' looks lak he cyarn' las' much longer. I dunno how come Mars Syd wuz so sot on gwine ter dis war!" he broke out after a few minutes' silence. "An' him all de chile his paw's got, too. I tole ole Marster dat Mars Syd wuzn't nothin' but er chile, an' dat he oughter kep' him home, an' ole Marster up an' cussed me out, an' say he'd er disowned Mars Syd ef he hadn't er went."

Marie had so hoped to hear news through the Elmores that she stood by, silent and downcast at the disappointment.

"And how is Aunt Judy these days?" asked Aileen, anxious to divert Marie's mind to something more cheerful. "It has been a long time since I have seen her."

Ephraim looked up at the girl from under his shaggy gray brows, a very lugubrious expression settling on his face.

"Ain't you h'yerd 'bout mah b'reavement, Missy? Judy wuz tuk erbout two mont ergo. Yas, honey, de Lawd tuk 'er an' lef' de ole man by hisse'f ergin." He brushed his sleeve across his eyes, and a sob choked him. "I's nigh onter eighty ye'rs ole, an' Judy am de fo'th wife what's left me."

"Oh, Uncle Eph, I'm so sorry!" cried both girls in a breath, deep sympathy showing in their faces.

"Yassum, hit wuz mighty bad." Here the ole fellow's face wrinkled up into smiles again, and he tried to straighten his bent back.

"But de good Lawd in his mussy hev seen fit ter smile ernother blessin' on me. I's got Big Nancy fer er wife now. You knows ole Aun' Big Nancy—she kin fry de bes' bacon an' mek de goodes' hoe-cake! Hit's jes' so good tell hit mos' melt in yo' mouf."

The laugh with which Marie and Aileen greeted this was interrupted by the sound of

galloping hoofs coming up the driveway. The rider was Dahlia, on her bay mare, Lady Jane, and she was riding like a wild thing, her hair streaming and her skirts flying. She waved her cap at them, her face flushed with excitement.

"The Yankees!" she cried. "The Yankees rode into Fairview this morning!"

CHAPTER III

The Preparation

At Dahlia's news the hearts of both girls seemed to stand still. What they had so dreaded was at last at hand—the foot of the invader was upon the hearthstone of the South. While they never contemplated the thought of violence of any kind from the troops, still the idea of coming into direct personal contact with Northern soldiers was intensely repugnant to them.

If some of the men were only at home! When they had ridden away, so full of hope, with such bright promise for the future, there had been no fear that a foreign foot would ever tread in enmity on Southern soil; they had left their women and children and slaves behind in perfect confidence that all would be well with them. And now the invading army had spread, with fire and sword, over the

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length and breadth of the shuddering land, leaving in its trail a disease new to the South —the Black Plague.

"What shall we do—oh, what shall we do!" cried Aileen, white to the lips, while Marie seemed deprived of the power of speech.

"I passed Father De Berne on the road," said Dahlia, as she came up the steps. "He will soon be here; maybe he can help us."

"How good of him to remember us!" Aileen exclaimed, her face brightening.

A few minutes later they saw the reverend father approaching, walking hurriedly, his white head bare, for in his haste he had forgotten his hat. Marie felt intense relief at sight of him, for here at last was a friend whose advice she could trust implicitly—one who was indeed a shepherd to his flock, to whom none appealed in vain for counsel and sympathy. For forty years Father De Berne had lived and labored in the village of Ellersly and the surrounding country. The little church of St. Cecelia—so dear to the

hearts of all—had been built under his supervision—a memorial to his faithful service, as his people loved to say. But a more lasting memorial would be the remembrance of the beautiful, selfless life he lived among his people.

An hour later Dahlia drove him home. He left Marie and Aileen in a measure comforted, but at the same time he made them understand something of the conduct to be expected from an invading army. He had heard many reports and rumors from other districts, and he felt it his duty to prepare these helpless girls for what lay before them. As yet none of the horror of war had reached them—only its sorrow.

Quietly, with as much secrecy as possible, they began collecting and packing the silver at "Oakdale" and "Idlewild." There was also a little money in gold and the family jewels to be hidden. In the afternoon old Jerry received a message that the side-porch steps needed mending. Answering the summons immediately, he found Marie seated in

the warm sunshine, a piece of sewing in her hands. Between hammerings and sawings and remarks upon the weather and the crops of the past season, they decided where things should be hidden. The chest of silver was to be placed on the office floor, covered with field peas, and the door left innocently open; the money to be put in a stone jar and buried in the hen-house under a sitting hen, and ashes sifted over the ground to hide the foot-prints.

Each girl should hide her own specially valued jewelry as best she could. At Jerry's earnest request, Marie allowed him to remove some of the ceiling in the attic and place some sides of bacon in there; so, if the worst of the reports were true, they would at least have something to eat.

Jerry reported the negroes at the quarters in a state of great excitement. They had all quit work, and some of them had left and gone to join the Federal troops at Fairview.

The prevailing excitement, mingled with

a much greater degree of fear, had reached Elsie and her dusky following, and there were several conferences held on the grass behind the office. At the last of these—a regular council of war, held just before sundown—Jink was excluded as being too young and inexperienced to trust. He, however, crept into the office and, vowing vengeance in his heart, concealed himself underneath a window and overheard everything that took place. And still in his place of hiding, as the early December twilight settled over the scene, he saw a silent procession stealing into the secluded grass plot from the direction of the "big house."

Snowdrop and Elsie were carrying a big wooden box, and Mose and Dick had spades, with which they began to dig in feverish haste. Not a word was spoken until the box was safely covered up in the ground and the earth trampled down on it.

"Dar now!" remarked Snowdrop in a sepulchral whisper; "now we done got erhaid er dem ole Yankees!"

"Humph!" grunted Jink to himself in his hiding place, "I dunno so much erbout dat."

"S'pose the Yankees don't come, after all," said Elsie, a trifle regretfully.

"Oh, dey's gwine er come, sho'," Snowdrop answered decidedly; "'caze Mose he h'yerd Sluefoot Ben an' ole Bal'haid Jim er talkin' behind de smoke-house—didn't you, Mose?"

"I sho' did; an' I h'yerd Sluefoot say he gwine tell dem Yankees 'bout dis place, an' dat we-all's folks hed guns an' powder an' shot hid out h'yer, an' dat would sho' fetch 'em; an' den ole Bal'haid he up an' say he gwine tell 'em whut rich folks we wuz."

"I can't see what makes them so mean," cried Elsie indignantly; "father always was just as good to them as he could be."

"Oh, dey's jes' nachully mean niggers. Mammy Cindy she say dar's some niggers got nigger souls an' some niggers got white souls," explained Snowdrop.

"Den dat ole Sluefoot an' Bal'haid is got

souls ez black ez de pot," put in Mose vindictively.

"We had better be going, Snow," Elsie suggested; "it isn't wise to hang around here too much. Somebody might suspect something."

So the four filed home as stealthily as Indians, leaving behind them a small African wondering uneasily whether his soul was white or black.

"Well, dey didn't hev no business ter treat me lak dat, no way," he argued with himself; "dey sho' done me er mean trick. Dar wuz some'n I could er put in dat box ef I had jes' been dar wid 'em. I don't keer ef mah soul is black!"

That night no one slept at "Oakdale" "big house" but the children, and their dreams were filled with Yankees seven feet high, who stalked around with drawn swords dripping with blood.

Just as the early dawn streaked the east with its first faint gray, Marie and Aileen lay down to try to rest, while Mammy Cindy

dozed before the nursery fire. Down in the orchard a strange trio was making its way across the creek and on toward the dense swamp that lay beyond the cottonfields.

It was Dahlia, wrapped in a long black cloak, leading by the bridle her favorite mare, Lady Jane. A negro boy of about fifteen sat on the horse's back, a tin bucket swung on his arm. He was a queer, deformed creature, with an enormous head and great, wide-standing ears. His body seemed shrunken, but his legs were unusually long and his feet huge and flat. He was generally considered to be half-witted, but Dahlia, to whom he belonged, often declared that he had more sense than most people. She was always kind to him, and defended him from ridicule, and he worshiped her with the faithfulness of a dog.

"Now, Cæsar," Dahlia was saying, "keep Lady Jane there in the swamp all day; keep her as quiet as you can, and to-night I will bring you more food. If we can just keep the Yankees from finding her!"

"Cæsar ain' gwine let nobody tech Lady Jane, Missy. Cæsar fight fus'. Don' you worry 'bout yo' hoss, lil' Miss Honey, 'caze Cæsar gwine tek good keer er 'er."

"I know you will, Cæsar; I knew I could trust you."

She left them safely hidden in the densest part of the swamp, and hurried back home just as the sun was rising. On the portico she stood and looked around her at the sweet, peaceful scene; the lawn, the rose garden, the whole world, seemed fresh and dew-covered, and in the orange trees near the steps a mocking-bird was pouring its soul into a glorious morning song of praise to God.

"Could anywhere be more beautiful?" thought the girl, her face raised to the crisp winds. She stretched her arms wide, with a pretty, impulsive gesture. "How I love it—*love it!*" she cried, her eyes shining.

True daughter of the South she looked, with her great dark eyes and clear olive skin, her black curls blowing about her face like a veil. For a long time she stood steeping her

soul in the beauty of the scene, her thoughts very far away.

A sharp noise out in front brought her mind suddenly from dreams to reality. Riding up toward her was a small squad of blue-coated horsemen, and slinking in their rear she recognized Sluefoot Ben. She drew her small childish figure up to its full height and waited for them at the head of the steps.

CHAPTER IV

The Yankees

"Good-morning, sissy!" said the leader of the squad of soldiers, lifting his cap with mock civility. He was accoutered in a corporal's uniform, and his face was of a coarse, disagreeable cast.

"Is your maw at home, sissy? Run, tell her she has company to breakfast, and be sure to tell her to have an extra good one, for we are gentlemen what can appreciate it."

A hearty laugh from his companions greeted this sally, but Dahlia made no response whatever.

"Humph! the little gal must be deaf," remarked the corporal. He gave a few orders to his men, who dispersed and surrounded the house, while he, with one other soldier, started up the steps.

"Wait!" exclaimed Dahlia, suddenly find-

ing her voice. "What are you coming in for?"

"Why, for breakfast, of course."

"Then wait outside, please, for breakfast isn't ready yet, and no one in the house is awake. I'll bring you chairs."

She ran in the hall and dragged out two chairs for them.

"Have seats, won't you?" she said courteously; "and I will go speak to the cook about breakfast."

Winking at each other significantly, they sat down, while Dahlia dashed up the stairs, two steps at a time, to Marie's room. No sooner was her back turned than they both got up and slipped into the hall, just as two of those who had gone around the house came in through the back door. They took the lower floor room by room, searching every corner, every closet, and every drawer. As they went up the stairs to the room above they were joined by two more soldiers, and the six of them stalked boldly up into an empty hall. A door on their right opened

suddenly, and Dahlia stepped before them, her face pale, but her eyes very bright.

"You gentlemen have made a mistake," she said, in a voice that trembled slightly. "The dining-room is downstairs, and breakfast isn't ready yet."

Without replying, they pushed by her rudely and flung open the door of the room she had just quitted. In it Marie stood, fastening hastily the dress she had just slipped into.

"May I ask why you are intruding in this manner into a lady's bedroom?" she demanded in a high, clear tone.

"We have orders to search this house, madam," answered the corporal, suiting the action to the word.

"But why—why is it necessary?" Marie began.

"We have been informed that you have arms and ammunition hidden here, and it is our duty to find them. And the least trouble you give us, the better."

"Marie! oh, Marie!" cried Aileen, run-

ning into the room with white, scared face, "the yard is full of Yankees!"

With a muttered curse the corporal went to the window. It was true; the whole place was swarming with bluecoats. In frenzied haste he returned to his search, but found nothing, and a few minutes later he and his men left the room in a very ugly mood.

"Oh, Marie, how can we live through this?" cried Aileen, with tears in her eyes.

"Hush!" whispered Marie warningly; "here come the children. Why, Elsie, what are you afraid of? The soldiers aren't going to hurt us."

"Dat dey ain't!" cried Mammy Cindy belligerently. "Dey'd sho' hev ter kill Cindy fus'. Now I'd jes' lak ter know whut you-all wants in h'yer?" she exclaimed, as the door opened and a crowd of soldiers pushed into the room.

"We must search this room, madam," said one of them, who seemed to be the leader.

"It has been searched already, as you

may see for yourselves," said Marie indignantly.

But in spite of protests they went through trunk, wardrobe, bureau, closet—everything in the room—but they found only Marie's dainty, threadbare underclothes and patched homespun dresses. These they tore from neck to hem and threw aside. The girls followed them from room to room and watched them destroying like vandals everything that could be of no use to them.

In Colonel Dupré's room they lingered longest. They ransacked it thoroughly, as they supposed, and were leaving it, when a spur on the heel of one of the soldiers caught in the fringe of a faded tapestry hanging on the wall and dragged it to the floor, leaving exposed to view a door hitherto unseen. With a sharp cry, Marie threw herself in front of it with arms outstretched.

"No, no!" she cried piteously, "not in here! Leave this one room alone. There is nothing in here that you would have—nothing!"

For an instant the soldiers stood irresolute; then one of them stepped forward.

"Madam, we must obey orders. Please stand aside; don't compel me to use force."

"There is nothing here of value to you—no arms nor ammunition, I swear it," she said, her gray eyes appealing to him. "It is my mother's boudoir, just as she left it, and —and she is dead."

But it was all in vain, for presently they forced her aside and broke open the door, but on the threshold they hesitated. It was a sunny little room, with writing-desk and book-shelves; in the center stood a wicker work-table, and on it a baby's unfinished long dress, the needle sticking in it as it had been put down by dear, dead hands. Hanging over the fireplace was a beautiful painting of the Sistine Madonna, whose tender eyes seemed to look down reproachfully upon the scene below. A big Irishman with sergeant's stripes on his sleeves elbowed his way to the front, and turning toward the hesitating soldiers, drew his revolver.

"The fir-r-st man who comes in here," he declared in his rich brogue, "will hear somethin' from Dinnis Malone. Stand back, me friends, and clear out. You an' me knows about thim orders. Ye wouldn't desecrate the mim'ry av the gur-r-ls' dead mother, wid the Blessed Mother herself lookin' on, now, would ye, men?" he continued persuasively. And seeing there could be very little of real value within, they allowed themselves to be persuaded, and turned away.

Dahlia, on going downstairs from Marie's room, found the yard full of soldiers and negroes. Everywhere was confusion, loud talking, often cursing, and constant passing back and forth. Suddenly a thought struck her, and she ran back to the kitchen and out into the yard as if she had wings to her feet. She had remembered a storehouse where were kept wines and homemade cordials. So far it had been overlooked by the soldiers, but she shuddered to think what intoxication would add to such a scene. In haste she unlocked the door, and with trembling hands

overturned every demijohn and broke every bottle. Soon the air was filled with pungent odors, and Dahlia's cotton gown and thin shoes were saturated with the liquid. She tried to slip away unseen, as she had come, but the spicy smell had attracted some of the stragglers, and she stepped out into their midst.

"Now what deviltry have you been up to?" cried one, seeing her wet garments.

"Oh, I say, ain't that a damned shame, boys!" exclaimed another, peering in at the open door at the overturned demijohns. The others crowded around him, bemoaning the lost liquor, and Dahlia, taking advantage of their backs, slipped away to change her clothes. But alas! not one whole garment was to be found, so she was doomed to carry about with her the evidences of her forethought.

Coming upon Elsie and Dick huddled in a corner crying with fright and hunger, she took them in charge, and the three went back downstairs in search of some breakfast.

They found fat Lucy alternately sobbing and praying, but cooking as fast as it could possibly be done, for a big soldier lolled comfortably in the window, a revolver held negligently across his knee, and he continually urged Lucy to renewed efforts. A squad of bluecoats removed the breakfast as fast as it was cooked and distributed it among those waiting outside.

"Dar's mah blessed lil' lambs now, comin' to see whar is dey bre'kfus'," and old Lucy began sobbing afresh. "I jes' knows you is mos' starved. Ca'line, you yaller hussy, dat ve'y nex' plate er waffles is fer dese po' starvin' chullen! I ain't er-gwine ter cook fer po' white trash an' de quality standin' by hongry!"

A flourish of the convenient weapon reduced yellow Caroline to immediate submission, but Lucy was past control.

"Oh, you kin shoot an' shoot all you's er mine ter, but I ain't gwine er cook ernother lick till dese chullen gits dey bre'kfus', an' you h'yer dat! You kin kill me ef you wants

ter, but whar you gwine ter git ernuther cook lak ole Lucy?"

This was a convincing argument, so Dahlia, Elsie, and Dick got enough breakfast to keep them from going hungry. Passing through the pantry on their way back to the house, they saw a red-faced German in the act of turning a big pan of cream up to his mouth.

"*Poison!*" cried Dahlia mischievously. The pan dropped with a crash, splashing the beloved blue uniform from top to toe. A coarse laugh greeted the mishap, and one of the men turned to look at Dahlia with an admiring glance. Catching sight of her stained garments, he sprang forward with an oath.

"Here, boys," he cried brutally; "it's the little damned rebel that overturned the demijohns!" In an instant he had his pistol pressed against her forehead. "Now," he continued, with a string of oaths, "I guess we'll teach you better next time."

Quick as a flash Dahlia reached down in

the pocket of her homespun gown and pulled out a small silver-mounted revolver; but the red-faced German knocked her arm up, and it discharged in the air.

"Here! what does this mean?" cried a commanding voice at the door, and a young man in the uniform of a lieutenant hurried into the room. "What is this, Fritz: bullying a lady? I'm surprised at you! Smith, put up that pistol instantly! Corporal, place both these men under arrest."

CHAPTER V

News of Keith

"Please, sir, marster, is yer foun' anythin' yit?"

Sergeant Dennis Malone looked down at the speaker, a diminutive darky, as black as ink, with a start of surprise.

"Phat's that ye'r sayin'?"

"Is yer foun' anythin' yer wants?" the little negro repeated. "'Caze ef yer ain't, I kin tell yer whar dar's er whole box full of things, 'caze I seed 'em when dey buried it."

At this information several bystanders crowded around in intense interest, for as yet they had run across nothing of any real value.

"Hear! hear! Malone, tell the little nig to lead the way," cried several voices.

"Where is the box, me b'y? Come along and show us."

The small son of Africa hesitated.

"What you gwine er gimme ef I shows yer?"

"Ah! So you're not betrayin' yer frinds fer love av yer inemies," laughed Malone. "Well, here is twinty-five cints fer ye."

So Jink led the way to the grassplot behind the office and showed the soldiers where the earth had been turned up and trampled down again. In growing excitement Dennis called for a spade and began to dig, his comrades making many bets and jests as to what he would find. When the wooden box was disclosed there were a few cheers, which the big Irishman quickly silenced.

"Do ye want to divide with the whole army that ye are shoutin' for 'em all to come?" he cried angrily. "And git out of the way," impatiently shoving away with his elbows the men who pressed eagerly around. "How can I do anything without room to move me arms!" he exclaimed, in exasperation.

"Well, hurry up, Denny lad, you're too mortal slow!"

With a jerk Malone pulled off the lid, and with bated breath the soldiers leaned over and peered within. For an instant there was perfect silence, then began a string of curses loud and deep.

"Where is that doggoned little black ape?" cried one wrathfully; and snatching the unfortunate betrayer by the back of his neck, he shook him until his teeth chattered, and with cuffs and kicks they sent him howling in the direction of the quarters. As for Dennis Malone, he sat on the grass silently staring at the treasures in the box. There were the remains of what had once been a beautiful doll, arrayed in faded finery; a big rag baby, a stuffed rabbit, and two worn story books. Two battered tin soldiers kept guard on top with a little woolly dog.

Malone drew his blue coat sleeve across his eyes, and carefully replaced the lid.

"Here, boys, come help me put this back where we found it," he said, "and the man that troubles one thing in it will have to fight Dennis Malone."

Late in the afternoon of the same day Marie and Aileen sat in the desolated library, worn out in body and mind. Most of the book shelves were empty, for the soldiers in a spirit of vandalism had taken the books—the prized collection of many generations of Duprés—and piling them in the yard had poured soft soap over them. A soldier passing through the room, his arms full of volumes, bowed low to the two girls.

"You see, lady, that I am of a literary turn," he said grandly.

"I see that you are of a roguish turn!" exclaimed Aileen indignantly, her blue eyes sparkling with anger.

"Oh, Marie," she continued, as the man strode on with his booty, "did you see the fate of your flock of turkeys? Two soldiers drove them through a gate while a third beheaded them with a sword as they came through."

"My poor, poor Christmas dinner!" lamented Marie. "I don't see where we are to get even the bare necessities."

At that moment the door opened and the young lieutenant who had rescued Dahlia, entered the room, a small silver box under his arm.

"Is this Miss Cavanagh?" he asked in a pleasant, well-bred voice, addressing Aileen.

He was very handsome, and his manner prepossessing, but Aileen held her head haughtily and regarded him with a cold stare.

"I am Lieutenant Anderson," he continued. "I had the good fortune to save your jewel box just now—it has your name on it. I was sure I could not be mistaken, you are so very much like your brother, in spite of the difference in coloring."

"My brother!" cried Aileen, springing to her feet. "Oh, do you know him? Have you seen him? Can you tell me if he is alive?"

"Very much alive," laughed the lieutenant, "though still in the hospital. He was desperately wounded, you know, and taken prisoner some months ago. He is my sister Katharine's special charge. We have at last

succeeded in arranging an exchange for him, as soon as he is strong enough to travel. But I am surprised that this is news to you. Katharine has written you several letters, I know, keeping you advised as to Keith's condition."

"I have received none of them, and have been so anxious about him. But is he not dreadfully homesick, Lieutenant Anderson?"

"He seemed very well satisfied when I saw him last. You know he has the finest nurse in the United States, 'if I do say it as hadn't ought to.'"

"And Michael—Lieutenant Cavanagh, do you know anything of him?"

"Rather too much, thank you. He is one of the greatest daredevils in the Rebel army."

"Thank you, oh! thank you so much for this news!" said Aileen earnestly. "I have been almost heartbroken over Keith. When Marie had letters from Colonel Dupré and Philip, and they could tell us nothing of him or of Michael, I almost gave up hope.

Thank you for my jewel box, too. I am glad to know there is *one* honest man among the Northern soldiers."

"I regret exceedingly that you should have been subjected to so many indignities," he said, his boyish face reddening, "but it is the fortune of war."

"I am not going to quarrel with you—I am far too grateful to you." And Aileen smiled at him bewitchingly. "Will you tell your sister how I *love* her for her care of Keith? It is such joy to hear that he has found friends."

During this conversation Marie had sat by strangely silent, her eyes looking wide and strained, and for some time, after they were left alone, she did not move.

When the young lieutenant rode away that evening he carried a vision of golden hair and blue eyes, and after several hours' deep thought upon the subject he decided that Aileen was the most beautiful name he had ever heard, and a blonde the most preferable type of loveliness.

Next morning Marie, with old Jerry, went over the place, and the result filled the girl with despair. They found that the Northern soldiers had taken or killed every live creature on the plantation save Dahlia's horse that Cæsar had hidden, and Joe, an ancient steer. The chest of silver was gone; and all the provisions had been confiscated or destroyed, so there was left for them to live on only some field peas and the bacon ceiled up in the attic.

"Nemmine, lil' Miss," consoled the old man, seeing the girl's sorrowful face, "de good Lawd will pervide. We gwine manage somehow. We can plow wid Lady Jane an' ole Joe——"

"Plow!—but what are we going to plant? Where can we get *anything!*" And Marie leaned her head on the top rail of the fence and burst into tears.

"Now, honey, don't do dat—don't werry dat lil' haid. Ole Jerry an' de good Lawd tergedder sho' gwine ter tek keer er Mars Phil's chullen!"

CHAPTER VI

The Return of the Crucifix

"This has been the longest day I ever spent," said Dahlia, settling herself more comfortably on the rug, "and it hasn't seemed one bit like Christmas."

"It has certainly been a very sad one." And Aileen sighed dismally.

Marie said nothing, but sat gazing into the fire, lost in sorrowful musings.

It was Christmas night. The children had gone to bed long ago, and the three girls, wearied with their efforts to be gay and happy, still lingered in the library. The blazing logs on the hearth diffused a warm flickering light over the room, that in a measure softened its bareness and gave it an almost cheerful look. "And to think but for Lieutenant Anderson and Sergeant Malone we would go to bed hungry!" Dahlia continued, with a little sobbing laugh.

"Lieutenant Anderson has been so very kind," said Aileen, her face flushing slightly. "And I can never thank his sister enough for what she has done for Keith."

Marie looked up suddenly.

"It is well that there are some few among them with a little Christian charity." Her usually sweet voice sounded harsh and bitter. "We have certainly found it very rare."

"Oh, but Sergeant Malone is a dear!" cried Dahlia. "I almost forget he is a Yankee."

"It is such a pity the troops stopped so near us; I feel very sorry for those poor people around Ellersly."

"Yes, it is very unfortunate," Aileen rejoined; "it is simply ruining the negroes. Uncle Tony tells me they have all left 'Idlewild.' Poor Keith! he will find the place a wilderness."

"Marie," remarked Dahlia after a little silence, "wouldn't it be funny to go North some time, years after this, and see our silver on some Yankee's table!"

"How absurd you are, Dahlia; we would never be at table with such people!"

"Well, good children," said Aileen, yawning, "you may sit up and gossip as long as you like, but I am almost asleep."

"I am, too." And Dahlia stretched lazily. "Aren't you ready to come upstairs, Marie?"

"I'm simply too tired to move," Marie replied wearily. "Don't wait for me. I'll come presently. Good-night!" And she held up her mouth to be kissed.

Left alone, her face relaxed into lines of inexpressible sadness, and she leaned her head on her hand in an attitude of utter dejection. For a long time she sat without moving, the fire light shining on her pale face and soft brown hair. The clock struck eleven, each deep solemn tone reverberating through the big empty room, but she did not seem to hear it.

Then just as the last stroke died away there came a little sound that made her sit up suddenly with blanched face and wide

frightened eyes. There it was again! Someone was tapping softly but insistently at the window that opened on the porch. For an instant she hesitated, then resolutely walked to the window. "Who is there?" she asked in low, clear tones, without drawing aside the heavy curtains. There was no answer, but the tapping was repeated a little louder, and as it seemed to Marie, impatiently. "Who is it?" she asked again, "and what do you want so late at night?"

"'Tis only a poor pedlar," answered a voice in a rich Irish brogue. "Won't you give me shelter, lady, and a bite to eat, in the name of the Blessed Virgin? Ye could not have the heart to turn away any one on Christmas night."

Now thoroughly alarmed, Marie hastily considered the situation. That it was one, or possibly more, of the detachment of soldiers at Ellersly, she did not doubt. If she refused admittance it could easily be forced—perhaps a brave front would be best. While still hesitating, she heard the man outside

fumbling with the window. He was slipping something through one of the broken panes of glass, and the article fell to the floor with a little clinking sound. Marie stooped quickly and felt under the curtain; then she stood up with a cry of amazement—she held in her hand her lost crucifix! Without considering another instant she opened the window, and there stepped into the room a stranger—a tall red-bearded man, muffled in a long black cloak, with a slouch hat pulled over his eyes. She turned cold with fear as he silently fastened the window and drew the curtains close across it.

And then—*"Michael!"* she cried, as he flung down the red beard and slouch hat, and caught her in his arms.

"Hush!" he commanded in a low tone. "You can be heard. Some one followed me—a negro, I think. It will be the end of me if the Yankees discover that I am here. Ah! Marie, my dear," he continued fervently, "it is like heaven to be here again—to be near you!" And he would have kissed her,

but she pushed him away, her face paling and flushing by turns.

"You must not kiss me, Michael," she faltered, "it is not right—you have no right——"

"That is just it, Marie," he interrupted, still holding her hands against his breast. "I want you to give me the right, here, now. Will you be my wife, dear?"

She tried to draw her hands away from him, and did not answer.

"I have loved you all my life," he went on earnestly. "I would have told you so ages ago, but I thought Keith loved you, too."

She stood quite still now, and her wide gray eyes searched his face.

"Yes?" she whispered, her lips quivering.

"I thought Keith loved you, and I did not want to be unfair to him, so I waited. But now——"

"Yes? go on—but now?" she questioned breathlessly, her hands on his breast fluttering like captive birds.

"But now it seems that he is in love with a Northern girl, a Miss Anderson—is engaged to her, I hear. He has not written to me in months. You know he was wounded and captured and she nursed him; it was then he fell in love with her. You remember Tom Grant? He was captured at the same time; he told me—— Why, Marie, dear, what is it?"

She had fainted in his arms.

"I am all right now, Michael," she said presently, smiling at him from the couch where he had laid her. "It was just such a hard day, and I am so tired, body and soul."

"It is my opinion that you are half starved," he said grimly, as he noted her wan face, and the blue shadows under her eyes.

"And Michael, dear friend, we will never speak of this again, please. I am sorry——"

"Never mind," he answered tenderly, "I understand, I understand. It shall be just as you wish."

He kissed her cold hand almost reverently and turned away to the fire that he might not see her face. For the first time in his life he felt bitter anger against Keith. To think that the love he had dreamed of possessing should be given to a man who did not want it! That such was the case he no longer doubted, and his heart ached for Marie as well as for himself.

A slight noise at the door caused him to turn sharply in ever-ready alertness for trouble. The sight which met his eyes was one to disarm fear, but he gave an involuntary exclamation of surprise. It was a slender girl, wrapped in an old white dressing-gown, her hair floating around her in a dusky waving mass, and her great dark eyes shining unnaturally bright from out of a face flushed like a rose. She held out her arms to him with a little unconscious gesture of tenderness.

"Michael, oh, Michael!" she cried.

Then suddenly the light left her face and her arms dropped heavily to her side.

"I am very glad to see you, Michael," she said, in a level monotonous voice like a child repeating a lesson. "When did you come? I hope you are well. It isn't very safe for you here, is it?"

She did not seem to see his outstretched hand, but went over to Marie's side.

"Marie, what is it?" she asked solicitously. "You look so queer and faint. Let me get you some water or do something for you."

"No, no. I'm all right now. I felt faint for a while, but it soon passed."

She drew Dahlia down to a seat on the couch, and kept hold of her hand.

"You were so long downstairs," Dahlia said in that lifeless voice that sounded so unlike her usual soft, musical tones. "I was frightened about you, and when I came and saw Michael, I was so very surprised—so startled——"

She stopped abruptly and did not finish her sentence.

Michael paced the room restlessly.

"Where is Aileen?" he asked. "I should like to see her, and I must soon be leaving here, to pass the lines before day."

Dahlia went upstairs to tell Aileen, and the two came back together in a few minutes. There was so much to be said—so many experiences to relate, that an hour was soon gone. Dahlia brought in the remnants of their Christmas dinner, and Michael, though ravenously hungry, protested against taking any of their meager store.

"Oh, you must, Michael," Marie insisted; "it would break my heart to have a guest leave 'Oakdale' hungry. Dahlia, look in the dining-room again. There is a bottle of wine there—the one Mammy hid. Bring it here, and a glass."

"I know where it is," exclaimed Aileen. "I'll get it." But she returned almost instantly, empty handed. "Oh, Michael," she gasped excitedly, "the Yankees are riding up the back way!"

"Then there is no time to lose!" he cried, springing to his feet. "If I am taken in

these civilian clothes there will be a hanging. They will be only too glad of an excuse."

"Here!" cried Marie guardedly, "come over to the side porch and slip down the cedar walk—it will be so dark they cannot see you."

With whispered good-bys, they let him out just as someone pounded on the front door.

"We have come to search the house," said an officer to Marie, who opened the door and stood quietly barring the way. "We know there is a dangerous Rebel hidden here."

It was nearly daylight when the soldiers rode away, empty handed, and the three girls could go back to their rooms to snatch a little rest.

Marie, worn out with the excitement and emotions of the day, was just slipping into the sleep of utter exhaustion when a light touch on her arm aroused her again. She started, and sat up in bed. Dahlia, still in her dressing-gown, her black hair streaming wild about her, knelt by her bed.

"Marie, I can't sleep until I talk to you," she whispered. "Tell me, did—did Michael ask you—did he ask you——?"

She hesitated, and Marie quietly finished the sentence for her. "To be his wife? Yes, Dahlia, he did."

"Oh, Marie, what did you say—surely, surely you did not refuse him?"

Marie's head went down on the girl's shoulder.

"I had to—I do not love him like that," she murmured.

"But, Marie, you will spoil his life—you will break his heart," pleaded the girl; "he loves you, and you would be so happy with him."

Marie did not answer.

"Couldn't you learn to care for him, Marie? There is no one else, is there?"

"No, there is no one else," whispered Marie brokenly; "there is no one else—now."

"Then when he asks you again, won't you say yes?"

Dahlia's voice sounded as though she were pleading for her own happiness.

Marie was silent for a long time, a tumult of thoughts and emotions crushing through her mind and heart. At last she spoke, very low, but clearly, calmly:

"If—if he asks me again, I will say yes."

Dahlia gave her a little impulsive squeeze.

"Thank you, Marie. Oh, I am so glad!"

CHAPTER VII

Dahlia

It was just after breakfast next day, and Marie, Aileen, and Dahlia stood on the front portico discussing anxiously the events of the preceding night.

"Surely, surely, he made his escape," Aileen was saying.

"Missy, I'm pow'ful feared he didn't."

The three girls turned in surprise. Old Jerry stood at the foot of the steps, a troubled expression on his wrinkled black face.

"Dem Yankees kotch Mars Michael las' night," he continued dolefully, "an' dat ain't de wust—dey say he is er spy."

In horrified silence they listened, for they knew that such an accusation meant death—an ignominious death.

"Somehow dey got on ter Mars Mike's trail, an' he slipped inter de Rect'ry an' Father De Bun hid 'im in de chu'ch, an'

dey foun' 'im, an' dey burned down de chu'ch——"

"No, no! surely they did not, Uncle Jerry, they *could* not!"

"Yassum, dey did. I done jes' come f'um dar. Dey burn hit down, an' de Rect'ry hit kotch er fire an' burn, too. Den Father De Bun he tuck an' argify dat Mars Mike warn't no spy, but dey wouldn't listen to 'im."

"Why, where was Lieutenant Anderson, that such outrages were committed?" cried Aileen indignantly.

"But Michael!" Dahlia interrupted.

"Miss Dahlia, dey gwine hang 'im at sunrise in de mawnin'."

Aileen sank down on the steps and hid her face in her hands. Dahlia seemed turned into stone.

"But can nothing—*nothing* be done?"

"Dey say dey sho' gwine hang 'im, Miss Marie."

"We must go to them at once and tell them he is no spy. Perhaps we can save him."

Aileen sprang to her feet, her eyes sparkling with hope through her tears. "Come, Dahlia," she cried, "let us all three go!"

Dahlia looked like a person in a dream.

"No," she said, shaking her head sadly, "it would be no use; they would not listen to us."

But Marie and Aileen went over to Ellersly on their mission of love, and soon after noon returned in deep despair. Their pleading had been in vain.

"Did you see him?" asked Dahlia anxiously.

"No, they would not even let us speak to him. Oh, Michael, poor Michael!" And Marie burst into tears.

Dahlia turned away without a word, and not long after, Aileen, looking from an upstairs window, saw her walking slowly toward the quarters.

Just as the sun was sinking behind the western pines there strolled into the Union camp beyond Ellersly two boys with a banjo.

One was small and sallow-faced, with closely cropped black hair, and ragged, ill-fitting clothes, and evidently belonged to the class commonly known as country Crackers. But there was something strangely appealing in his melancholy dark eyes, and a contradictory drollness about his mouth. His companion, who carried the banjo, was a queer, misshapen, ape-like negro, with wide-standing ears and a pleased childish grin stretching his thick lips. The strange couple were objects of great interest to the idle soldiers and the targets for many jests. Some of these the white boy replied to in his soft dialect, with such native humor as sent the crowding soldiers into convulsive merriment.

"Here," cried one, "give us some music, why don't you?"

"Waal now," drawled the boy, "be perlite, an' take us to a fire, an' give us some of you-uns' supper. We-uns ain't hed enough to eat since you durn Yankees come down thiser-way."

He looked up at the big blue-clad soldiers

with a smile so whimsical and friendly that it quite won their hearts. They led them to the nearest fire and set before them a tempting supper. The negro ate ravenously, but the other boy spent much time chaffing with the soldiers and looking about him. There were several prisoners on the other side of the fire, among them Michael Cavanagh, his ankles bound together and his hands tied behind his back. He took little notice of what went on around him, but sat staring gloomily at the glowing coals. Quite a crowd of soldiers had gathered around, eager for any diversion from the monotony of camp life.

"Thar now, Pete," said the white boy presently to his black companion, "we hev eat about as much as we kin hold, so chune up."

Pete tuned up, struck a few chords on the banjo and the little Cracker began to sing. And such singing! The soldiers listened in breathless delight. He sang the negro plantation melodies as only one reared among the negroes can sing them. The crowd drew

closer and closer, calling for one song after another.

"Waal, now, I'm kinder sung out," said the boy after a while, "but I tell you what—I'll bet thar ain't nobody in this here crowd that kin beat me pickin' a banjo." He smiled at them invitingly, his even white teeth gleaming against the sallow brown of his face. "I'll bet er chaw er terbaccer," he repeated.

"I'll bet two-bits I can beat you and not half try," said a voice from behind the crowd. The soldiers turned, craning their necks to see who had spoken.

"It's that damned rebel spy," said one.

"Lemme look at the man kin beat me playin' a banjo!" cried the boy derisively, walking over to where Michael sat. "Think you kin play, do you?" he queried, looking up at Michael from under his ragged hat brim.

"I can beat you any day, and not half try," Michael repeated.

"Aw, listen to him! Come here, somebody, an' awntie this here smarty's hands an'

let's hear him play." For an instant there was silence, then Dennis Malone came forward and untied Michael's hands.

"He ain't got long to live," he remarked; "let's have some fun and hear 'em play.

The boy put the banjo into Michael's hands; stiff from his long inaction, he clumsily dropped it.

"Humph!" remarked the small countryman; "talk about *pickin'* a banjo—he can't even hold one!"

Nevertheless the prisoner did play it wonderfully well, and there was much patting of feet in time to the infectious music. But at last the boy could stand it no longer, and snatching the instrument from Michael, he bent over it and made such music as few in that crowd had ever heard before. Hands began to clap, and the negro, who had been sitting by silently, began to dance. The soldiers cleared a space for him and formed a ring around, shouting, clapping, stamping, and urging him on. It was a strange sight. Twilight had settled over the camp, and the

fire cast long, queer shadows over the group and the surrounding pines. The negro, with his enormous head and flopping ears, his long, thin legs and great flat feet, danced in a perfect frenzy, faster and faster. He seemed like one possessed, and the soldiers, wild with delight, stamped and cheered. At last the music ceased suddenly, and the dancer dropped to the ground in utter exhaustion.

"Here, Malone, where's your flask? Give the poor brute a drink. Didn't he dance like hell?"

"Like a very imp of Satan!"

"God-ermighty, men!" cried a voice behind them, "the Rebel spy has escaped!"

A dismayed silence followed this announcement. The little Cracker was the first to speak.

"Now, ain't that a durn shame!" he remarked regretfully. "But you won't hev no trouble ketchin' him," he added consolingly; "he's been tied up so long, he's 'bleeged ter be stiff."

Suddenly he raised a grimy forefinger and

pointed toward the pines in the direction of "Oakdale."

"Thar he is! Thar he is!" he cried, dancing up and down excitedly; "don't you see him dodgin' behind them trees? I knowed he couldn't er got fur!" And he started forward on a swift run. Instantly the dazed soldiers awoke to action and, like a pack of deer hounds in full cry, began the chase.

About this time at "Oakdale" Marie and Aileen stared through the library windows into the gathering dusk, in anxious misery.

"It isn't like Dahlia to do this way," Marie was saying, "and it isn't safe for her to be out so late."

"What was it Mammy Cindy said?"

"That she saw Dahlia at the quarters and she said tell me not to be worried about her —that she would be late getting home. But Mammy did not say where she was going."

"It is something about Michael." Aileen spoke positively. "She has some wild scheme

in her head to save him. Oh, Marie, isn't it dreadful to think of it—*Michael* to die in such a way!"

The door behind them softly opened and closed. Turning quickly, they saw Dahlia standing by the library table, looking at them with strange unseeing eyes.

"Merciful Heaven!" cried Marie; "what is the matter—what has happened?"

"Dahlia Dupré!" Aileen exclaimed, "what have you done to your hair?"

With an odd, confused look, Dahlia raised her hands to her head. "My hair?" she repeated wonderingly.

"Yes, your hair—it is all cut off, and your face looks stained brown!"

Marie crossed the room and took the girl by the shoulders, turning her toward the light.

"Dahlia," she said sternly, "what does all this mean?"

For answer Dahlia began laughing hysterically.

Marie gave her an impatient little shake.

"Are you crazy?" she cried in exasperation. "Why don't you answer me—*what is the matter?*"

Just then the door flew open and Mammy Cindy rushed into the room. Taking in the situation at a glance, she pushed Marie and Aileen away.

"Go 'long, bofe of you—ain't yer 'shamed ter pester de chile lak dat! Come rat h'yer ter yo' mammy, mammy's po' lil' lamb!" And the old negress took Dahlia in her arms, crooned over her and petted her until the wild sobs ceased. "Now, lil' Miss, git me some er dat wine ter gib 'er, an' den come he'p me put 'er ter baid. Naw, honey, neber mine," soothingly to Dahlia, "don't try ter talk now; yo' mammy knows all erbout it, an' she'll tell 'em d'reckly. You jes' come on an' go ter sleep."

An hour later Dahlia was sleeping quietly, her hand clasped in Mammy Cindy's, and Marie stole downstairs to tell Aileen and the children the wonderful story of how Dahlia and Cæsar had saved Michael's life.

"Oh, I don't see how she had the courage!" cried Aileen, when Marie had finished. "It is the very bravest thing I ever heard of. Suppose something had gone wrong and they had suspected her—how dreadful it would have been!"

"Yes, you see Michael recognized Cæsar at once, of course, and must have been on the lookout for something. How lucky that the Yankees had never seen Cæsar—you know he was hiding Lady Jane in the swamp when they were on the place."

"Michael must have guessed that the little Cracker was Dahlia. I always said she should have been an actress," laughed Aileen. "She certainly must have looked and acted the part to perfection."

"Is Dahlia a heroine, Marie?" inquired Elsie reflectively.

"Yes, dear, a real heroine," Marie answered, with shining eyes.

"But she couldn't have done any of it without Cæsar," remarked Dick, "so Cæsar is a real hero."

CHAPTER VIII

The Shadow in the Darkness

The first breath of spring had passed over the Southland, and nature stirred from her short winter nap. Everywhere were tender greens, blossoming fruit trees—a perfect wealth of delicate colors—and in the hedge of Cherokee roses were nesting twittering birds. High up in a pecan tree a red bird was whistling and calling ecstatically to the awakening garden that summer was coming.

The sun shone warm and the breeze that lifted the brown curls on Marie's forehead was soft and balmy. It was the season for day dreams, for awakening hopes, and tender remembrances; but on the girl's still face was the look of one who had bidden an eternal farewell to hope and joy. The despair of a few weeks ago had given place to a brooding sadness pitiable to see in one so

young. She sat by the library window looking out upon the sweet green earth, thinking how little nature's mood accorded with the hearts of the South.

Vague, disturbing rumors came to them of Lee's surrender, but they could hear nothing definite. It had been weeks since they had received news from those far-away dear ones with Lee's ragged army, and Marie's heart grew heavier when she thought of their fate. Home matters, too, troubled her greatly. The outlook for the coming year was dark indeed. The negroes were becoming more and more unmanageable, and in Marie's soul was growing a horrible fear, new to her and hard to combat, because it was illusive, intangible. She had never spoken of it to anyone—never even put it into words to herself, so it haunted her, a great, black, hideous shape looming up in the darkness around her.

The steps needed mending very often those days, and she and old Jerry had many long talks, but the result of these conferences generally left her more anxious than before.

At the library table Dahlia was writing letters. A few weeks after his escape, a letter had reached her from Michael, full of his intense gratitude for what she had done for him, wondering how she had stood the trying ordeal, and begging her to write to him at once, and often, on the bare chance that he might receive her letters. He could hardly find words in which to express his appreciation of her bravery and resourcefulness, and Dahlia so treasured this missive that she wore it to fragments reading it.

And but yesterday had come to her a letter from Sydney Elmore, written on the eve of a great battle, and sent by his body-servant, Ned.

Ned had left before the fighting had begun and had passed through innumerable hardships and dangers to place his master's letter in Dahlia's hands. Dahlia read it through blinding tears, and then laughed, her eyes still tear-wet. For it was such a letter! Sydney's boyish love had deepened and strengthened in the last four years, and though still touched

with a half-mystic, chivalrous romance, it was a man's love now. His letter was full of it; and filled, too, with boyish reminiscences that brought the smiles to Dahlia's emotional features.

Aileen, sitting near with her sewing, looked up at her from time to time, enjoying the girl's rare beauty. The cropped hair was growing out rapidly, forming soft black ringlets all over her head, and she looked more winsome than ever.

"Just listen to this!" cried Dahlia, glancing up at Aileen and Marie from over the top of the letter in her hand. "Dear old Sydney—the idea of his remembering it." And with a voice that trembled slightly, she read aloud to them:

"'So many pictures of you are passing through my mind to-night. I see you as a tiny, wilful child, and then a little later, when you first began going to Ellersley with us to say lessons to Father De Berne. There is one time—it stands out so clearly against the

multitude of other memories that it makes me laugh now in spite of my heavy heart. It was late in the afternoon, and we were coming home from school. Uncle Jerry was driving Thunder and Lightning to the spring wagon, and you sat on the front seat with him, because you were the youngest. You were only six or seven, and your dress was torn and your curls wild, as usual. Behind in the wagon were Michael, Marie, Aileen, Phil, and myself. Presently we passed the orchard, and we stopped the wagon and all piled out to get peaches. We made Uncle Jerry come, too, and left you in the wagon to hold the horses. I know not what demon of mischief possessed you, but you laid the whip on old Thunder and Lightning and left us. I can see it now—the two big black horses galloping on over the hill toward "Oakdale," and you, a midget, bobbing up and down on the seat clinging to the reins with your tiny brown hands, and we, like hounds after a rabbit, chasing on behind you, Uncle Jerry in the lead, shouting "Whoa, Thunder! whoa,

Lightning! Lawd-er-Mighty, dat baby's sho' ter git kilt!" What a long, hot walk we had, and how angry we were with you when we arrived and found that the old blacks had brought you safely home! What times those were! Will we ever be together again, I wonder?'"

Here Dahlia's voice broke, and her head went down on the table. The tears fell on Aileen's sewing, and Marie sat motionless, her hands clasped tightly in her lap.

It was nearly five o'clock in the afternoon, and the house was very still, as the children had gone with Mammy Cindy on some errand to the quarters. The singing and twittering of the birds outside, and the soft swish of a rose vine swayed by the south breeze, were the only sounds to be heard. Not a word had been spoken for fully fifteen minutes, when suddenly Marie sprang to her feet with dilated eyes and quick-drawn breath, and stood rigid in the attitude of one listening to a faint, far-off sound. Aileen and

Dahlia looked up at her in surprise, but in an instant they heard it, too, and their eyes met in questioning wonder. It was only footsteps, quick and light, coming up the front steps and across the portico. Then the front door opened and closed, and the light tread came on toward the library.

"Keith!" Marie's white lips could scarcely utter the name.

"It is Keith!" cried Aileen joyously. She threw down her sewing and ran to the door. Eagerly she opened it—then on the threshold stood transfixed.

The hall was empty!

For a moment they looked and listened; the silence was profound.

"But I heard him!" cried Aileen, looking from one to the other in bewilderment.

"So did I," said Dahlia; "but it must have been our imaginations—we were thinking of him so, I suppose."

Marie stood holding to the back of her chair, trembling like a leaf.

"I heard him when he came in the iron

gates," she half whispered. "They clanged behind him, and he walked fast up the drive."

The deadly fear at her heart she left unspoken, but Mammy Cindy, coming in just then, and hearing about it, was not so considerate.

"Dat's all I wants ter know," she said, dolefully shaking her turbaned head. "Mars Keith sho' am dead. Dat wuz his ha'nt come back ter see we-all."

"Hush, Mammy!" cried Dahlia sharply, seeing Aileen's troubled face. "That is perfect nonsense. We imagined it, that is all."

"Call it 'magin' ef you wants ter, but I calls it er ha'nt," grumbled the old woman, as she left the room.

Two weeks later Aileen received a letter from Katharine Anderson telling them that Keith had been very ill, but was then out of danger and on the high road to a speedy recovery.

"Last week," she wrote, "we gave up all hope. On Friday it was, at five o'clock in the afternoon, we thought he was gone—his

spirit seemed to have left his body; but now the doctors say he will soon be well. He sends his love to you."

This letter brought great relief to them all, and they were so filled with rejoicing over Keith's recovery that one thing was lost sight of by all save Marie. Miss Anderson had said that the week before this letter was written—on Friday, at five o'clock, they thought him dead. It was that same day and hour she heard him come in the big gates and up the drive into the hall. She did not mention this to anyone, and indeed had little time to think of it herself, so troubled was she over plantation affairs. The negroes on the place not only refused to work, but some of them were insolent and turbulent, and many wild tales were brought from the quarters by Elsie and Dick. One by one the house servants, hitherto faithful, left them, until none remained save fat Lucy, the cook, and Mammy Cindy. In the fields old Jerry, with Cæsar's help, did all the work. At last the situation grew so serious that the children were for-

bidden to leave the immediate vicinity of the house. No one dared to go to the quarters but Marie, and she went with inward misgivings. The two negroes known as Sluefoot Ben and Baldhead Jim, who had left with the Federal troops, had returned, and now reigned supreme over the negroes of "Oakdale" and "Idlewild." The horrible fear, the great, black, overshadowing shape, crept closer through the darkness; and Marie, lying awake hours and hours when the others slumbered peacefully, felt its approach, and quaked to the very soul.

CHAPTER IX

The Uprising

One night, about the first of May, the three girls, with Elsie and Dick, sat on the front portico talking. It was early twilight; one star had risen over the pecan tree, and in the western sky the afterglow still lingered in rich, warm tints. In little pauses in their talk they could hear the twittering and complaining of the nestlings in the thick branches of the rose vines that clambered up the columns of the portico. A hush seemed to have fallen over the outside world, and gradually it stole over them, until their desultory conversation trailed off into silence.

But presently Dick grew restless.

"Say, Marie," he said, "isn't it past supper time? I am awfully hungry."

"Yes, dear. Aunt Lucy is unusually late to-night. I think I will go see about it."

But before she could take a step, Lucy appeared around the corner of the house in a state of great excitement.

"Oh, Lord-er-'Mighty, lil' Miss!" she cried in a high, wailing voice. "I's seed de sign, an' I's got ter go!—I's got ter go!"

"What on earth is the matter, Aunt Lucy?" asked Marie anxiously, going to the end of the portico. "Why don't you have supper?"

"De supper am cooked an' sot on de table, but I's 'bleeged ter go, 'caze I's seed de sign."

Breaking into a weird chant, she started off in the direction of the quarters.

Marie called to her in vain. The only response she could get was:

"I's seed de sign!"

"Dat ole Lucy must sho'ly hab gone plum' crazy," exclaimed Mammy Cindy, coming out of the house and joining Marie. "I ain' neber seed sich carryin's on. I's jes' gwine march myse'f down dar an' see what ail dat 'oman. Dar's some'n ain' right 'bout dis business. I ain' lak de way dem niggers been

doin' sence ole Sluefoot and Bal'haid come back."

"Well, you go see about it, Mammy; and tell Uncle Jerry to come up and see me right away."

Supper was soon over, and the weather being quite warm, they returned and sat on the front steps, waiting for Mammy and Jerry. The night was dark, but in the sky were myriads of stars. Dick soon put himself to sleep counting them.

"It certainly is strange that Mammy doesn't come back," said Dahlia, after a while.

"I'm surprised at Jerry," added Marie. "He is usually so prompt."

Presently Dahlia went into the library to look at the clock.

"Marie, it is half-past ten," she said when she came back. "I can't understand Mammy doing this way."

Then, descending the steps of the portico, she walked down into the yard, where she could look in the direction of the quarters.

For the space of ten or fifteen minutes she stood watching and listening intently, then called to Marie in a low tone:

"Come here just a minute," she said. "Listen!" she whispered, "and look at those moving, flickering lights—they are torches, and there is a bonfire. What does it mean?"

Borne on the soft night breeze there came to their ears a sound, now swelling, now dying away, and seemed to them like the buzzing of innumerable bees, the sighing of the west wind through a forest of pines, or the beating of surf on a rocky shore; but they knew it to be the ceaseless murmuring of many voices.

With a long shudder, Marie threw her arm around Dahlia.

"I am afraid," she whispered. However, the next moment she drew herself up to her full height.

"I am going down there and see for myself what it means, and find Mammy and Uncle Jerry."

She started down the path leading to

the rear of the house, but Dahlia caught her arm.

"Marie, are you crazy? You shall not go!"

"But something must be done! We can't sit here and wait for—God knows what! Surely they would not hurt me!"

"Hush! listen!" whispered Dahlia, still holding her firmly. From the thicket behind the office sounded the clear, mournful call of a whip-poor-will; three times it came, then all was still. Faintly, tremblingly, Dahlia answered it, and three times it came again. The tall grass around the office rustled and parted, and a shape, black against the surrounding darkness, moved slowly toward them. Marie with difficulty stifled a scream, but Dahlia stepped forward.

"Cæsar!" she called softly.

"Hit's me, Missy, an' I's got Lady Jane back h'yer," answered a voice in the same guarded tone. "Dey shot me up, but I got out and slipped Lady Jane out'n de stable. Missy, you mus' ride—*ride* jes' ez fas' ez you

kin ter Ellersly an' bring somebody; bring er white man—de pries', er *anybody,* 'caze de 'Idlewild' niggers an' de 'Oakdale' niggers gwine er rise ter-night, an' don't nobody but de debbil know what dey gwine do. Ride, Missy, ride!"

"Oh, Dahlia, you can't—in the dark and alone! Cæsar, you go!"

"I c'yarnt, lil' Miss. I's done hurt mah foots, an' mah han's er gittin 'loose an' I'd never git dar. You better go, Missy. Don't was'e no time er talkin'. Sluefoot an' Bal'-haid done tied up Unc' Jerry an' Aun' Cindy. Aun' Cindy she knocked ole Joe f'um 'Idle-wild' in de haid wid er stick er wood, so dey tied 'er up."

"There is nothing else to do, Marie. I must go. I'm not one bit afraid. But, oh, Blessed Mother, I hate to think of leaving now!"

"H'yer de hoss, Missy. Don't spare 'er none, 'caze dey's gwine er rise 'bout mid-night."

So Dahlia rode off into the darkness of the

country road alone, an agony of fear in her heart. She knew every foot of the way to Ellersly; the road was level and sandy. So, in perfect confidence in her sure-footed horse, she urged her on in a swift gallop. The little creatures of the wood scuttled about in the long grass on either side, disturbed by the furious rush of the rider. She heard them, and sometimes a twig cracking more loudly than usual sent her heart into her throat. It was a wild ride, and Dahlia, praying with every breath that she might find assistance in time, peered into the darkness around, and strained her ears to catch every sound.

Suppose she should ride into a crowd of negroes from "Huntingdon," or elsewhere, going to join those already gathered at the "Oakdale" quarters, and they should stop her? The blood throbbed fiercely in throat and temple at the thought, and she wished for the pistol the soldiers had taken from her.

Suddenly from somewhere in the pine forest on her right came a weird, blood-curdling shriek ringing out into the night with a pe-

culiar melancholy that made the girl's heart stand still and cold with horror. Her mare gave a snort of fear and half reared up, quivering in every limb.

"It was only a screech-owl, Lady Jane," said the girl, with a hysterical laugh, as she patted the animal's neck. "Hurry, Lady Jane! Oh, hurry, if you love me!"

And as if she understood the sobbing entreaty, Lady Jane stretched closer to the ground and galloped on and on, faster and faster.

Like a flash she passed the Haunted Hollow, where the children always walked a-tiptoe and spoke in whispers when they came that way. Almost unconsciously Dahlia glanced fearfully over her shoulder at the dark spot and urged her horse on with a pressure of her heel. The pines sped by faster and faster, black shapes against the blackness of the night, and the girl, in ever-increasing fear, cried out:

"Oh, hurry, Lady Jane!"

In the little cottage where Father De Berne

had lived since the Federal army had burned the rectory, there sat with him three travelers. They were still around the little table whereon the good priest had placed all the food he had for their refreshment. They had eaten it all to the last crumb, but the worn, hungry look had not left their faces. Their gray uniforms were ragged and soiled, and the youngest of the three—a mere boy—carried his arm in a sling. They were too tired to talk, for they had ridden hard all day. Father De Berne, throwing them occasional anxious glances, bustled around, mixing something in a pitcher. Taking three glasses from a cupboard, he placed them on the table and was about to fill them, when a distant sound arrested him. It was the galloping of a horse. Nearer and nearer it came, up to the very steps of the cottage, and stopped. The three men sprang to their feet, and the priest, lamp in hand, flung open the outside door.

"Oh, Father De Berne!" cried a girl's voice from the darkness, "get somebody, and

horses, and go quick to 'Oakdale'! The negroes are rising! Oh, be *quick! quick!*"

The lamplight pierced the intense darkness without and shone on a slight, childish figure, with bared curly head, seated on a panting, foam-covered horse.

Her entreating glance passed the priest and reached the men grouped behind her. With a sobbing, joyous cry she held out her arms to them.

"Oh, Michael, Michael! Father! Thank God!"

CHAPTER X

The Return

Marie watched Dahlia ride away into the night, then turned back to the house, and as she went up the steps past Aileen she stooped and whispered in her ear. Aileen gave a little half-strangled cry and sprang to her feet.

"Merciful Heaven!" she gasped; "what are we to do?"

"Wait and trust, that is all," answered Marie simply; "and be brave."

"What is it, sister?" asked Elsie anxiously, pulling at Marie's skirts.

"Nothing, dear, but that the negroes are very rowdy to-night, and we had best not go to bed yet."

Elsie began to cry.

"Now, there is no need to do that, Elsie; there is nothing to fear. Dahlia has ridden

for Father De Berne to come and talk to them."

Nevertheless the girl's white face and trembling hands belied her brave words. Elsie, somewhat comforted, sank down by Dick, who, curled up like a kitten, slept the sleep of innocence.

"Marie, what shall we do if they come?" whispered Aileen.

"Nothing but sit here on the steps. It would be of no use to go inside, since the Yankees took the hall doors. It will be better to show a brave front—they are really cowards at heart, you know."

For an hour and a half they sat on the steps waiting, listening to the confusion of sounds that came from the direction of the quarters. Once there was a gunshot, and the murmuring rose louder, though still as alarmingly undefinable, as the sounds floated through the night air. With their hearts in their throats the two girls listened and waited for what seemed an eternity.

The old clock in the hall struck twelve; and

mingled with its "ten! eleven! twelve!" there sounded, faint and far away, the beating of a drum.

Aileen clutched Marie's arm until she winced with pain, but neither spoke. The deep, heavy boom of the drum swelled louder and louder, and the ceaseless murmuring rose fiercer and higher.

They could now distinctly hear the chanting of some wild, weird melody, pierced now and again with a shrill shouting. Nearer and nearer came the voices of the rabble, until Marie and Aileen could see the red glare of their torches. Elsie began to cry again, and Marie took her in her arms, whispering to her until the child grew quieter.

Around the corner of the house the motley crew approached, the great drum in the lead. There were several hundred negroes in all, collected from "Idlewild" and the adjoining country, and down at the "Oakdale" quarters they had been stirred up to a state of wild excitement by such creatures as Ben and Jim and Idlewild Joe. Across the yard they

marched, screeching their weird chant; around the house—in seeming oblivion of the girls on the portico watching them—and back again to the front. Every few minutes their leaders broke out in chanting, punctuated with shrill exhortations. Around and around the house they went, in time to the booming of the drum, and with every complete revolution the circle drew in closer to the frightened spectators.

"We's done seed de sign!" cried a voice high above the din. "We's done seed a sign dat de black man's time hab come! We's gwine rise ergin de oppressor, an' ain' gwine er wuk no mo'!"

"Praise de Lawd! De time hab come!" chimed in an assenting chorus.

"We's gwine hab dis lan' fer our'n," continued the penetrating voice; "we's gwine er see de white man plow an' hoe!"

"Praise de Lawd!"

"We's done seed de sign!" chanted the chorus.

The column finally came to a halt close to

the portico steps, and Marie rose to her feet, all fear forgotten.

"What is the meaning of this?" she cried in clear, commanding tones. "You have celebrated enough now—it is time you were going home. Do you understand? Disperse, and go home instantly—every one of you!"

"Yas, Lawd, we's gwine home."

Sluefoot Ben, a big negro with a brutal, cunning face, stepped from the front ranks, close to Marie, and grinned horribly in her face.

"Yas, honey, we's gwine home; but we got er gre't min' ter bu'n down dis ole shack fus'. Yas, honey, dis ole——"

"I'll teach you 'bout 'honeyin'' my young mistiss, you low-lived debbil!" screeched a ferocious voice. "Tek dat, an' *dat!* an' go ter de onliest home dat'll hab you, you chile er Satan!" And Mammy Cindy, with a paling for a weapon, soon beat the would-be leader into insensibility.

"What you fool niggers mean er-comin' h'yer pesterin' dese po' lambs what nebber

done you no harm in yer lives? Ain't yer 'shame'! What yer reckon Mars Phil gwine er say ter yer when he h'yers 'bout sich cyar'-in's on?"

"Ketch 'er an' tie 'er ergin," yelled several voices. "She ain't nothin' but er white folks' nigger!"

Baldhead Jim sprang forward and tried to grasp the irate old woman, but she flourished her paling around her head. "Don't you tech me, you ole bal'haid ape! I's er dangerous 'oman, I is!"

A withered old crone leaning on a stick stepped forward from the shadow of a tree and shook her fist at the belligerent figure on the steps.

"You done kilt my Joe!" she screamed shrilly, "an' I's gwine er conjer you. I's gwine er hoodoo you ra't now. Dat arm gwine swivel up an' drap off. Hit's begun ter dry up now—hit's begun, 'caze de time hab come!"

"Hit's dryin' up, is it?" jeered Cindy, with derisive laughter, shaking her weapon

combatively; "you jes' come er little closer, you ole witch, an' I'll show you 'bout it!"

"Oh, Marie, look!" cried Aileen wildly. "They have set the barns on fire!"

A frenzied shout arose from the crowds of negroes in the yard, and they excitedly pressed closer about the portico. Suddenly the air was rent by a child's piercing shriek, and Marie looked behind her just in time to see Elsie struggling in the arms of a big burly negro.

She tried to run down the steps to Elsie, but consciousness forsook her, and she fell in a little lifeless heap at the foot of the steps. Unhappily she did not know that Elsie had merely fallen from the portico and had been picked up and handed back to Mammy Cindy by one of the Elmore negroes from "Huntingdon"; nor did she hear the thundering of horses' hoofs coming up the drive.

The next instant into the crowd dashed two men, both in the uniforms of captains, one in blue and the other in gray.

"What does this mean?" cried a stern

voice. "You devils! Put out those fires instantly—do you hear? I've got a great mind to cowhide the last one of you!"

"Lawd-er-'Mighty, Mars Keith! We didn't mean no harm; we wuz jes' celebratin' 'caze we wuz free!"

"Well, I'll find out all about that to-morrow. Put out those fires, and be quick about it!"

They rushed pellmell to obey him, cringing and whining like whipped hounds.

"Where is Cæsar?" called Keith. "Here, Cæsar, take care of the horses. Come, Anderson," turning to his companion, "let us see where the girls are. We were just in time."

At the bottom of the steps his foot struck against some soft object. He stooped, and found Marie lying in a little heap where she had fallen. With a deep oath he picked her up.

"If she is dead, or injured in any way," he cried bitterly, "they shall pay for it with their lives!"

He carried her into the house and laid her tenderly down on a couch.

It was about this time that Colonel Dupré, with Philip, Michael, and Dahlia, rode into the yard. Their jaded horses were a lather of foam, and Dahlia was so stiff and weary that she fell almost fainting from Lady Jane, and with difficulty dragged herself into the house.

Fatigued as he was from having been in the saddle all day, the Colonel, with Philip, rode immediately to the quarters, while Michael went to the assistance of Captain Anderson, who was overseeing the extinguishing of the flames, giving commands and bringing order out of chaos. His blue uniform, representing as it did the power of the Federal Government, was the finishing stroke, and in a very short time everything was quiet and the negroes dispersed.

When Marie opened her eyes it was Keith's face, tender and anxious, that she saw bending over her. Too weak and shaken to try to understand what it all meant, she

simply looked up at him and smiled, giving the hand that held hers a little squeeze.

Then into her eyes crept a frightened expression, and she tried to sit up.

"Elsie! Where is she?" she asked breathlessly.

"Upstairs. Mammy is putting her to sleep—she is all right. Lie still, dear; everything is quiet now, and we are here to take care of you."

Secure in the comfort of Keith's presence, she closed her eyes and lay quite still for a while. He knelt by her side, holding her hand and studying the thin, pale face—noting the deep shadows underneath her eyes and the wistful droop of her mouth. To Marie it seemed like a dream, from which she must shortly awaken.

It was Keith's voice, speaking very softly, that broke into her half-conscious state.

"Marie, what are you doing with this?" With his free hand he touched lightly the tiny gold crucifix that hung on a chain around her neck. Seeing her puzzled expression, he

continued: "You know, once after a battle, I saw Michael with it, and I remembered that you had said it was for the man you loved—that you would give it to the man you were going to marry. Why have you taken it back again?"

"I did not give it to him. He found it, and has returned it, that is all."

He bent over her closer.

"Then you do not love him?" he whispered eagerly.

"No, I do not," and she turned away her face.

"Then, Marie, is there any hope for me?"

She flashed him a surprised look.

"For you? But, Keith, I do not understand. I thought—I heard—Miss Anderson—that you——"

"That I loved her? No, Marie, I have never loved any one but you. Katharine is engaged to John Fairfax, who is a surgeon in the Confederate army, and a dear friend of mine."

Then ensued a little silence, a wonderful,

delicious silence, such as only falls between lovers.

"Sweetheart, have you not known all this time that I loved you with my whole soul?"

She did not answer, but tried to hide the gladness in her eyes by covering them with her hands.

"Tell me, Marie," he insisted, drawing her hands down and holding them in his: "Do you love me?"

"Yes, Keith," she whispered; "so dearly —so very dearly."

CHAPTER XI

A Knot of Red Ribbon

After things had quieted down, Michael went in search of Dahlia. His thin, dark face wore a troubled look, and he held a piece of crumpled red ribbon in his hand. He found her alone in the dining-room. The spirit that had upheld her through her wild ride to Ellersly seemed to have fled, and she lay back exhausted in her father's armchair at the foot of the table, her eyes closed, and her hands inert and lifeless in her lap.

Michael stood on the threshold regarding her. How delicate, and childish, and tired she looked! Should he add to the weight already upon her heart? Perhaps he had best not tell her now. Torn between pity for her and an impelling force from within that urged him to speak and have done with it, he hesitated at the door. Dahlia must have felt

his presence, for her lids quivered and opened, and she met his gaze with eyes that lighted up at sight of him.

"Come in," she said, with a wan little smile; "come, sit down; I know you are dead tired. Is everything quiet?" Then catching sight of the ribbon in his hand, she sat up very straight, life and color coming slowly back to her face.

"Where did you get that?" she cried, holding out her hand. "It is the ribbon I gave Sydney! Where did you get it?"

He came to her side and put it gently in her hand.

"I took it out of his hand after the battle of Appomattox," he said, speaking very gravely. "You know he always wore it on his arm. Even the Union soldiers came to notice it. There was heavy fighting around a gun—well, we got the worst of it, and were being driven back, when suddenly Sydney caught sight of a young Yankee boy in the enemy's front ranks with this ribbon stuck on the point of his bayonet and was shouting and

jeering. Sydney turned his horse about, and, drawing his sword, called to the men to follow. He rode like a whirlwind straight for that Yankee boy. Our men gave the Rebel yell and rushed after him. The enemy retreated at that point—we won back the gun. When I found them, the young Northerner and Sydney were both dead, but Sydney had this ribbon clasped tightly in his hand."

Dahlia listened to him breathlessly, the slow tears gathering in her wide brown eyes and falling unheeded on the ribbon in her lap. Michael watched her pityingly, wishing she might have been spared this pain. When he had finished the recital of Sydney's chivalrous end she caught the crumpled, stained thing to her lips and kissed it reverently.

"Such a glorious death!" she murmured, her voice choked with sobs. "And how dearly he loved me!" Then, hiding her face in her hands, she leaned forward, with bowed head, and was very still.

While Dahlia was engrossed in her silent

grief Michael bent over and touched her dark curls very lightly with his lips.

"God bless you, dear," he whispered, "and help you bear this."

He would have left her then, but just as he reached the door she called him back.

"Michael, come here; there is something I want to say to you."

He came, and stood leaning against the high back of a chair near her.

"It is something rather hard to say," she went on hesitatingly, her hands toying nervously with the ribbon in her lap. She paused, and he, wondering greatly, waited for her to continue.

"Well?" he said at length.

"You remember that night before you were captured"—she spoke hurriedly now, and the color flamed in her cheeks—"and what you asked Marie?"

"Yes," he answered, his brown face growing sympathetically red; "I asked her to marry me, and she refused."

"Yes, I know she did; but, Michael, if

you will ask her again, I think—I believe—I *know* she will say *yes,* and she will be much happier with you than she is now. I am sure of it. You will ask her again, will you not, Michael?" She was looking up at him beseechingly, and speaking somewhat incoherently in her excitement.

Michael's face had grown very grave, and his clasp on the chair-back was tense and strained.

"I am sorry you have told me this," he said, "for it is impossible. I cannot in honor ask Marie to marry me again—because I love someone else."

Dahlia lifted her eyes to his, her vivid face a-quiver with a conflict of emotions.

"Love someone else?" she murmured incredulously.

"To my sorrow, yes. I had not intended speaking of it for a long time yet, but the fates seem to have decreed otherwise. Let me begin with my love for Marie. You know I loved her all through my childhood and youth and early manhood. It is good for

a boy to have a love like that—it purifies him, ennobles all his thoughts of life. Well, you know they say love is blind. My love for Marie was blind. I did not understand its quality, and I was blind to the fact. I loved Marie as the heathens loved their goddesses —as the good Catholic loves the Blessed Virgin."

His voice trembled a little, and he paused to steady it.

"Do you remember the story of Orion?" he went on presently. "You know, after he became blind he had them lead him to the top of a hill where the first sunbeam could touch his eyes, and his sight came back. Well, that morning after my escape from death in the Northern camp I was on a hilltop when the sun rose, and it touched the eyes of my soul, and I knew then that the worship I had given Marie was not the love of a man for a woman. Since the other love has come to me I know the difference—it has a warmth, a fire—a divine fire—that the other could never have had. It is like comparing the pale cold

light of the moon to the glorious, unclouded sunshine."

He ceased speaking, and Dahlia sat with downcast eyes, waiting for him to continue. At last the silence grew painful to her.

"Is she a Northern girl, like Keith's betrothed?" she asked, speaking very low.

He hesitated before he answered.

"No, the girl I love is not of the North," he said slowly. "On the hill that morning after my escape, I planted in my heart, there to live and grow forever, a Southern flower —a Dahlia."

Dahlia turned in her chair until her face was hidden against its cushioned back, so Michael could only see one small, pink ear and part of a soft brown cheek flushed like a peach bloom.

He went to her and knelt beside her, clasping the nervous little hand that held the ribbon in both his own.

"Dahlia," he said, speaking very low, "had you given your heart to Sydney? If you had, if you love him, speak just one word

and I will go away at once and wait. I am willing to wait for years."

Slowly she turned to him her love-flushed face and glad eyes. With her free hand she pushed the black waves of hair from his forehead and looked deep into his steadfast blue eyes.

"Michael," she said, "I have never loved anyone but you for one instant in my whole life."

There was a long silence between them after that. Then Michael laughed and broke the spell.

"Dahlia, tell me why, loving me yourself, you wanted to marry me to Marie?"

"Because I never dreamed of your loving me," she answered, raising her head from where it had rested on his shoulder and meeting his smiling glance. "And I thought you loved her, and I wanted you to be happy."

"But Marie did not love me, dear."

"No, I knew that; but she could not have helped growing to love you afterward. I did not want her to spoil your life—and hers

—over Keith, so I got her to promise if you ever asked her again to say yes."

"I think Keith loves her, after all—there was some mistake."

"Let's go find them," cried Dahlia, springing to her feet. "We have been selfish in our happiness. They must be wondering where we are."

Hand in hand, like two children, they went out of the old dining-room and down the hall in search of Marie. They found her in the library with Keith. Dahlia ran to her with a little joyous cry and clasped her in her arms.

"You are happy, Marie! I can see it in your face. And I—I am so happy, and so thankful!"

And looking like a sweet wild rose, she held out one hand to Michael.

"Marie, will you give her to me?" asked Michael, in a voice full of emotion. "I want her more than I ever wanted anything before in my life."

"De Lawd he'p!" cried Mammy Cindy,

standing in the door with arms akimbo regarding the group. "Sich c'yarin's on I ain't neber seed. Dar's Cap'n Anderson er-kissin' Miss Aileen out on de po'ch, an' h'yer's my two lambs er-kissin' in de house. Whut you reckon Mars Phil gwine say? But he better not say nothin' but 'Bless you, mah chullen,' er he'll sho' h'yer f'um Cindy!"

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